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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON IRAQ

Summary

-- Lead story in all papers today, April 13, focuses on developments in Iraq and particularly the situation in Falloujah and the truce reached between Iraqi guerrillas and US marines. Front-page reports highlight remarks made by the Coalition Forces Commander Ricardo Sanchez that the "Mission" of coalition forces is to "kill or capture" Muqtada Al-Sadr. Other stories highlight President Bush's remarks that an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza is not an alternative to the Roadmap during a press conference with the Egyptian President.

Editorial Commentary

-- "America looking for excuses"

Daily columnist Fahd Fanek writes on the back page of semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (04/13): "The excuse used to justify the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq was the disarmament of the weapons of mass destruction. When it was proven that there are no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, American leaders began looking for other excuses, and hence the search began of Iraqi 'programs' to manufacture weapons of mass destruction. When these programs were proven not to exist, they started talking about Iraq's 'intentions' to manufacture weapons of mass destruction. These excuses convince no one. America's aggression was already planned, because the neo-conservatives who dominate Washington policy-making believed that occupying Iraq would guarantee their control over not only Iraqi oil, but also Arab oil, and that establishing pro-American rule in Iraq would give them the chance to dominate the whole of the Middle East. So the talk about reshaping the political map of the Middle East started, talk we no longer hear these days because it became evident that Iraq left a bitter taste in the mouth, that its occupation is no picnic, and that the occupier is paying the price everyday with money and blood. The Americans need a new excuse to justify the viscous resistance they are facing in Iraq. and this excuse says that the terrorists are afraid of democracy and that they want to abort the American project of making Iraq a free and democratic country. This is an attempt to belittle the minds of people who know that Iraq today is as far from democracy as it will ever be and that what awaits Iraq under the occupation is more bloodshed, destruction and sectarianism. The only way for the American people to get out of the Iraqi quagmire is to oust the current administration or to bring about what is called a 'regime change' in Washington. The world will be a much safer and more stable place and America's position would be better off if it returned to respecting legitimacy and international law."

-- "The country of people rejecting the occupation"

Columnist Mohammad Kawash writes on the back page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (04/13): "The security situation in Iraq collapsed faster than the Americans expected. The situation is so out of control that it worries the leaders of the occupation. Meanwhile, resistance actions have reached their highest level, placing the occupation forces and collaborators in a situation that is similar to the last days of America's occupation of South Vietnam.. The occupation forces and the U.S. administration have committed a number of mistakes, slip-ups and human rights violations, so much so that the Iraqi people, of all sects, have become inflamed with anger and revolution. What is going on in Iraq today confirms that those who painted a rosy picture for the occupiers' journey to the land of fire and anger are a group of orientalist who are so distant from the Iraqi people's concerns and who know nothing

about the traditions, the values, the morals and the faith of this hard and stubborn Arab community. These orientalist, who have taken up the seats at the governing council, do not have the support and respect of the Iraqis, and when the time of reckoning comes and when the occupation forces get ready to leave, these governing council members will be the first to take refuge in foreign embassies or to flee to American ships, exactly like the Vietnamese collaborators did when the occupation collapsed in Saigon." gnehm